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ABSTRACT

This booklet, written for elementary teachers and counselors, provides information for a three-session stress and culture shock program for fifth and sixth grade students in overseas schools. Session 1 presents an introduction to the program, including discussion questions. Session 2 focuses on stress and culture shock through examples and discussion. Session 3 presents exercises and methods for handling stress and culture shock, including organization and planning, managing the environment, managing attitudes and beliefs, and physical and emotional fitness. The Martian/Venusian Culture Game, designed to increase student awareness and acceptance of cultural differences, and the Kron Observer Game, designed to develop student understanding of the shortcomings of first impressions and stereotypes, are presented. The document concludes with a bibliography of related articles and materials. (BL)

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INFORMATION PACKET
FOR
DEVELOPING STRESS/CULTURE SHOCK PROGRAMS
FOR
STUDENTS IN OVERSEAS SCHOOLS
A WORKSHOP PRESENTED
AT
THE NE/SA TEACHERS' CONFERENCE
COLOMBO, SRI LANKA
MARCH 23 - 26, 1984

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A THREE SESSION

STRESS AND CULTURE SHOCK PROGRAM

FOR

FIFTH AND SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS

by

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Summer, 1983

Session One

Introduction

We are going to spend some time, for the next few weeks, talking about the problems that people have when they move from their own country to another country.

Some of you may have lived in several different countries. For others, Egypt may be the first country where you have lived other than your home country. Let's begin today by introducing ourselves, telling where we are from, how long we have been in Egypt, how long we plan to stay in Egypt, and whether or not we have lived in other countries besides Egypt and our home country. Let me introduce myself first.
(Introduction and Discussion)

Good! Well, I can see that for some of you this is your first time living overseas. For others, it is not. All of us, when we first move to a new country, notice many differences between our own country and the new country. Some of the differences we like and some of the differences we don't like. Let's begin by talking about some of the good things you have found in Egypt. What kind of nice things have you found in Egypt that you couldn't find in your own country?
(Discussion)

Good parts could include the following: travel opportunities, opportunities to learn a new language, different foods, less pollution, climate, better school, etc.

Now let's talk about some of the bad points. What kinds of things do you find in Egypt that you don't like as well as in your own country? (Discussion)

Negative points could include the following: broken family ties, friends are unavailable, language differences, academic environment more difficult, homesickness, climate, father is away on business trips more often, certain food products are unavailable, television is in another language, no Saturday morning cartoons, etc.

All of the things that we have mentioned, good or bad, are changes in our lives. Whenever we experience changes in our lives, we also experience stress. Does anyone know what stress is?
(Discussion)

Stress is pressure. When you lift a heavy weight, you are putting stress on your muscles. When you have a lot to think about, you have pressure or stress on your mind. When we move to a new country, we have to deal with a large number of changes which can cause stress. The next time that we get together, we will spend more time talking about stress, particularly the stress that we have to handle when we move to a different country.

Session Two

Stress and Culture Shock

Stress (in simplified terminology) is pressure. When we lift a weight, we put pressure on our muscles; we stress our muscles. Mental or emotional stress is a lot like physical stress. Emotional stress is pressure on our minds.

Stress is not bad. In fact, we all need a certain amount of stress. If we don't exercise our muscles, they become very weak from under stress. Doctors usually require their patients to get out of bed and walk as soon as possible after an operation. If people are handicapped and can't walk, they usually receive physical therapy. When the astronants go to outer space for long periods of time, they must do special exercises to make up for the fact that when there is no gravity, there is very little actual stress on the muscles, even though they are working in the spaceship. (Discussion - to assure retention)

Therefore, as you can see, stress is not a bad thing - it is a good thing. So, let's say that I decide that I want to get in shape and I go to the gym and start working out with the weight machine. What would be a good weight for me to try to lift? - 500 pounds?
(Response)

Of course not. First of all, I couldn't lift 500 pounds, and second of all I could hurt my muscles trying.

We need a certain amount of physical stress; too much or too little stress isn't good. We need to find just the right amount. If we decide that we want to become stronger, then we need to lift a little more each

day until we build our muscles up. In this way we get stronger, and we are able to handle larger and larger amounts of physical stress. Still, none of us will ever be able to lift 5,000 pounds. We can become stronger and lift more and more weight each day, but there will always be an upper limit; - there will always be an amount that is impossible to lift.

Emotional stress is much the same. Emotional stress is pressure on the mind. If we don't have enough emotional or intellectual stress, then we become dull. If we don't use our muscles, they become weak. If we don't use our mind, then it becomes weak too. However, just as too much stress can hurt the muscles, too much stress can hurt the mind as well. We can learn to handle more and more emotional stress just as we can lift more and more weight, but there is always an upper limit - an amount that we can never handle.

Too much stress or too little stress is bad. Take, for example, a guitar string. If it is too loose (too little stress), it sounds funny. If it is too tight (too much stress), it may break. With just the right amount of stress, it is in tune. People under too much stress sometimes develop headaches, upset stomaches, or other ailments. That is why it is important to balance our stress and stay in tune.

The body has certain ways of handling stress, which haven't changed much over the centuries. Take our caveman ancestors for example. When a caveman was walking through the forest and happened upon a saber tooth tiger, he had basically two choices. What were they?
(fight or Flight)

That's right, he could either run away or fight. In either case, he would need more energy - so the body developed a way of giving him more

energy. Whenever the caveman was in danger, the body produced chemicals, like adrenalin, that gave him more energy.

Has anyone ever heard of adrenalin?

(Discussion)

Has anyone ever heard of stories where people have done amazing superhuman feats, because of adrenalin?

(Discussion)

In many ways the body hasn't changed much since caveman days. When we are under stress, our muscles tighten, our blood pressure rises, and our body produces chemicals that give us more strength and energy. Unfortunately, in modern times our choices aren't always as simple as the caveman who only had to decide whether to fight or run away. For example, if your teacher gives you a difficult test and you are stressed, you can't fight your teacher and you can't run out of the room. Instead, you have to stay in your seat and work on your test. This isn't always easy because our body is full of extra energy. Our body created this extra energy to help us handle our stress by fighting or running, but because we can't fight or run, it actually may make us more nervous causing even more stress. Therefore, in modern times it is important that we learn to develop stress skills, skills needed to help us deal with stress.

We will talk more about stress skills in a later session.

When we move from our home country to another country, we are under more stress than we were in our home country because we have to deal with different ways of doing things, different customs, different ways of thinking, and often a different language. Remember, whenever we go through a large number of changes, we are under more pressure (under more stress), than we were in our home country.

All of the changes that we have to deal with in a new country and our feelings about the new country, both good and bad, result in culture shock. Has anyone heard of culture shock?
(Discussion)

Culture shock occurs when we move from our country to another country where the ways of doing things and the ways of thinking about things are different from our own way. People often feel confused and out of place in the new country and may feel homesick for their own country.

In short, when we move to a new country, we are under more stress than usual. Consequently, we need stress skills. Next time we will talk about the ways people sometimes mishandle stress and also about some better ways of handling stress problems, particularly stress problems that result from moving to a different country.

Session Three

Handling Stress and Culture Shock

We can't always solve every problem, sometimes we just do the best we can by coping with problems. Coping mechanisms help us do this. However, coping mechanisms are often used too much or for the wrong problem. When they are used too much or for the wrong problem, they are harmful because they prevent us from dealing directly with the problem.

I'm going to give you some examples of how people sometimes use coping mechanisms to cope with living in a new country:

(a) Some coping mechanisms help us cope with a problem by not recognizing that there is a problem.

(Denial, suppression, repression)

For example, some students might say:

"I'm not having any difficulty at all in adjusting to my new country."

(Discussion)

(b) Other coping mechanisms protect us from responsibility for our problems by blaming other people for our problems.

(Displacement, projections)

For example, some students might say:

"It's my Dad's fault that I'm unhappy; he took this job in Egypt."

"Egyptians are dumb."

"Egyptians are unfriendly."

"Egyptians don't like Americans."

(Discussion)

(c) Students sometimes cope by convincing themselves that it's okay for the problem to remain unresolved.
(Rationalization)

For example, some students might say:
"I don't want to know anything about Egypt or get to know any Egyptians anyway, so what do I care about learning Arabic."
(Discussion)

(d) People sometimes daydream about the past or imagine that the situation that they are dealing with is different.
(Fantasy)

For example, some students spend all of their time in Egypt thinking about the good old days in the U.S.A.
(Discussion)

(e) People sometimes release their frustration in other areas, such as in sport or art activities.
(Sublimation)

For example, a student might become involved with the swimming team or track team and exercise his frustration away.
(Discussion)

(f) Some people deal with their lack of achievement or ability in one area by doing something else well.
(Compensation)

For example, students who are not good athletes often compensate for their lack of athletic skill by being good students. American students who cannot adapt to life in Egypt might compensate by being even more American.

We all use coping mechanisms to cope with stress. Some are better than others. Sometimes they are an appropriate way of handling a problem. However, they are often abused. Far too often we continue to use coping mechanisms over and over even though they don't work well and never really get at the root of the problem. It is often better to deal more directly with a stress problem by developing stress skills. Four general approaches to dealing directly with stress due to culture shock are as follows:

(a) Organization and planning.
(b) Managing your environment.
(c) Managing your attitude and beliefs.
(d) Physical/emotional fitness.

I. Organization and Planning

Remember, sloppy time management produces stress. Often, the difference between a good student and a bad student is that the good student manages time well and does not fall behind in assignments while poor students do not manage time well. Good marathon runners pace themselves; poor ones do not.

When people are under stress, there is sometimes a tendency to try to solve all the problems at once or there is a tendency to throw your hands in the air and give up entirely. Neither of these is a good solution. Instead it would be better to stop, take a look at your situation, and then develop a realistic plan to solve your problems.

When you first arrive in a new country, you are bombarded with many different ways of doing things and perhaps even a different language. You may need to learn how to get around by public transportation, how to shop, how to speak the language, or many other things. Remember, you can't learn

everything at once. First, decide what you need to learn. Second, decide which things you need to learn now and which things can wait until later. It is generally a good idea to write your plan and timeline on paper. Finally, commit yourself to your plan. People are generally good at developing plans but far too often they don't follow through on their plans; committment is very important.

II. Managing Your Environment

You are responsible for managing your environment; if you don't do it, it won't get done. This is particularly important when you are in a new country and a new school.

One of the first things that you will need to do is make friends. If you have lived in the same place for a long time before moving to Egypt, then chances are you have had the same friends for a long time. Sometimes when people have had the same friends for a long time and then move, they have difficulty making new friends because they have never had to make friends before and don't know how to go about it. Be sure to talk to your counselor if you have this problem.

Sometimes students who move a lot are reluctant to make new friends because they know that someday they will move away and leave their friends behind just as they have in the past. These students need to realize that friends are necessary; we can't be friendless. Also, it might help if they would look at the situation differently. Instead of moving and losing friends, they are moving and making more friends; they just need to keep in touch with their old friends by mail.

When we move to a new country, our family often goes through changes as well. Your father may have a new position or a promotion with more responsibilities. He may be away from home more often. Your mother may be assuming some of your father's responsibilities in his absence. Also she may be having difficulty doing some things that she found easy before, such as shopping, because of language differences and differences in the way things are done. Consequently, your mother and father as well as your brothers and sisters may be a bit more irritable and difficult to get along with than usual; chances are you are too. That is because we are all under a lot of stress during our first few weeks in a new country and have to be a bit more understanding with one another.

III. Managing Your Attitudes and Beliefs

Adjustment to a new country has a lot to do with attitude. One time, when I first moved to Belgium, I accidently bought buttermilk (because I couldn't read French at the time), and poured it on my cereal in the morning. I could have reacted by being angry or upset but instead I chose to see it as a humorous situation. On another occasion, because the words for horse and hair are very similar in French, I asked the barber to cut my horse. He immediately broke into laughter. I could have felt embarrassed but instead I laughed along with him. Remember, whenever something bad or embarrassing happens, you have two choices, you can respond by saying either, "Gee that's awful," or "Gee that's funny." People who don't take themselves too seriously are usually better in stress situations. There is an old saying, "In every cloud there is a silver lining." Look for the good points in any bad situation, and you'll be much happier.

Another thing that sometimes affects our attitude is the inability to let go of the past. We may have liked where we lived before, and we may miss friends and relatives, our old school, McDonald's and Burger King, and video games. Still, you can't live in the past and if you try, you won't be very good at living in the present. It's normal to miss friends and relatives so keep in touch by mail. It is normal to miss other things, such as American food or television, but if it's unavailable, it really doesn't help to spend all of our time thinking about it. Sooner or later you must let go of the past and begin to live in the present. Once you do, you'll find many good things there as well.

Remember, the story about the train that said, "I think I can ..."? There is a lot of truth to that story. When people think that they can do something, they have a much better chance of actually doing it.

Let's say you are a basketball player on the CAC varsity team. It's the European championship game. CAC is behind by one point, and you are at the free throw line shooting two shots. If you sink both shots, CAC will win. If you miss both, CAC will lose. If you sink one shot, the game will go into overtime and CAC will lose because all of the other players have either fouled out or injured themselves during the game. How do you feel? (Discussion)

Most likely you feel nervous. Your palms are sweating, the basket looks like it's three miles away, and your knees are so shakey that you can barely stand up. Are you going to make the shot? (Discussion)

Probably not, unless you start thinking like the little train. That's what professional basketball players do. They tell themselves that they aren't nervous, even though they are, so that they can calm themselves down and shut off the body's flow of adrenalin. Do you all remember what adrenalin is?

(Discussion)

Whenever any of us are in a situation like that, we either see ourselves succeeding or failing; either making the shot or missing it. It's like a little movie in your head that you see over and over before you shoot the ball. Those who see themselves making the shot have a good chance of making it. Those who don't are almost certain to miss.

When I lived in Belgium, I saw many students who were fluent in French but were afraid to try their skills outside the classroom. I saw other students who were much less capable in French who were better able to adjust to life in Belgium because they weren't afraid to fail. Consequently, they often succeeded when they thought that they might fail simply because they were not afraid to fail and they weren't afraid to give themselves positive messages.

You can be very much in control of your attitude. Don't let a negative attitude control you.

IV. Physical and Emotional Fitness

When you move to another country, you are under considerable stress. As you know, stress can affect your mind and your body; both work together.

Regular exercise helps to keep your body and mind fit so that you are better able to handle stress. It is also a good way to burn up the extra adrenalin that the body produces while we are under stress.

Nutrition is also important. Food is fuel to the body and a strong body is better able to confront stress.

Alcohol and drugs are not good ways to deal with adjustment problems. To solve an adjustment problem, we need to deal directly with it - not attempt to escape from it.

You may find that you need additional sleep during adjustment. This is normal. When your body is under stress, it often requires more rest because it is working overtime during the day.

Finally, relaxation is important. All of the things mentioned here, particularly exercise, have the added benefit of leaving us in a more relaxed state. Sometimes additional help is needed. If you find that you are extremely tense, talk to your counselor about relaxation. He will have some additional tips that you can use.

THE MARTIAN/VENUSIAN CULTURE GAME

Purpose:

To increase student awareness and acceptance of differences between cultures.

Procedure:

Three students are selected to be Martians and three students are selected to be Venusians. Other students function as observers.

The Martians and Venusians are meeting on the moon to discuss the possibility of trade. The Martians have little food but a lot of rocket fuel whereas the Venusians have a lot of food but little rocket fuel. The Martians and Venusians have communicated by radio and can speak a common language - English. However, this is the first time that the Martians and Venusians have met in person and therefore they are unaware of the gestures used by the other group. Like many people, they may incorrectly assume that gestures mean the same thing in all cultures.

The Martian and Venusian participants are given cards explaining the gestures used in their culture but are unaware of gestures used in the other culture. The observers are aware of the gestures used in both cultures.

The following gestures are used:

Meaning	Martian Gesture	Venusian Gesture
"Hello"	wink	shake head up and down
"Goodbye"	bow head and close eyes	stick out tongue
"Yes"	shake head up and down	shake head left and right
"No"	shake head left and right	bow head and close eyes
"Insult"	stick out tongue	wink

After a 10 to 15 minute role play the group should discuss their reactions to the role play and what they have learned from the role play. Every culture has certain verbal and nonverbal cues which differ from other cultures. The differences between the students' culture and the host culture should be discussed at this time.

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KRON OBSERVER GAME

Purpose:

To develop student understanding of the shortcomings of first impressions and stereotypes.

Procedure:

One half of the group participants are selected to be earthlings and the other half are selected to be visitors from the planet Kron. The visitors from Kron are told the following:

"You are from the planet Kron. You were just beamed to earth by your mother ship and have materialized in this room. Your job is to learn as much as possible about earthlings and then report back to the mother ship. You have only 10 minutes. Forget everything that you know about earth and play like you are a Kronian on his or her first visit to earth. Pay attention to how people act and what people say. You are invisible and cannot talk to the earthlings."

After five minutes, list Kronian impressions on the blackboard. List only those things actually observed during the past 10 minutes. Refuse to list impressions based on previous knowledge. After the list is complete, hold a discussion on the accuracy of the list and the shortcomings of first impression made on limited information.

This activity can lead into a discussion on stereotypes. The word stereotype should be defined. Stereotypes of different nationalities should be listed on the board. A discussion on the accuracy of stereotypes and on the fact that stereotypes often develop from inaccurate and limited first impressions should be conducted.

Possible stereotypes for discussions could include the following:

a) Americans	-	loud, pushy, efficient, superficial
b) Dutch	-	thrifty
c) English	-	stuffy, stiff upper lip
d) Irish	-	heavy drinkers, quick tempered
e) French	-	wine and food lovers

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SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

OF

STRESS, CULTURE SHOCK, AND COUNSELING

MATERIALS

FOR

OVERSEAS EDUCATORS

INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING

A

CULTURE SHOCK PROGRAM

FOR

STUDENTS, PARENTS, OR FACULTY

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